

## Remembering - by Becky Bailey

Though I can't say that I had the kind of relationship with my mother that so many of my friends did—the kind that grew from late night chats on my bed, or cooking spaghetti for 10, or being told we acted more like sisters than mother and daughter—she is probably my greatest hero.

No, my mom was all business. And, thinking about it, I guess she was the first business woman I ever knew. A piano teacher, her home office was our converted front porch which, every day around 1:30 would begin to emit the tinklings of little fingers playing "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star." By 7:30 her last teenaged prodigy would wind up the day with some rhapsody or Mozart sonata.

What my mom taught me, though, was straight from her own experience. A child of the Great Depression, a young bride during World War II, her greatest piece of advice to me was, "be able to take care of yourself; you may not always have a husband to take care of you." Raised in a mill village in rural South Carolina, she had seen hard times. And she knew her share of "War Widows."

There was no way she could know that her advice would be prophetic. No one would have guessed, but both of her girls eventually were divorced, and her advice—well, at best it created in me an early awareness of who I was.

My mother always became indignant when a telephone caller asked, "Who is this?" Her usual response was, "with who do you wish to speak?" But, on one occasion, she rather tersely told the caller, "this is Mrs. Bob Bailey. Who do you want to speak to?" I was floored, not by her response to the caller, but that she had referred to herself as the female counterpart of her husband, my dear dad! Not even, "this is LaVerne Bailey," but "Mrs. Bob!"

Then and there, I knew that I was a feminist! Though at the age of 8 or 9, I didn't know what a feminist was, or who Eleanor Roosevelt, or Mother Jones or Susan B. Anthony were, or that AAUW was 100 years old. I announced a short time later to my startled parents that I was going to marry a man named "Bailey" so I wouldn't have to change my name! Luckily for me a school chum, Donald Bailey, tolerated my crush on him for years until I reckoned that, heck, I didn't *have to get married at all!* Of course I did, twice (!) and, both times, held on fiercely to the name I was born with.

In recent years, I have enjoyed volunteer work in international development in Latin America. We often think of ourselves (North Americans) as so highly sophisticated and "politically correct." Yet in Latin America the thought of a woman "changing her name" at marriage is, well, foreign. Once I asked a male friend, "what was Alicia's 'maiden' name?" His response, "The same as it is now! We don't ask our women to change their identities for us!"

Though it may not seem that this piece is about my AAUW experience, hopefully it illustrates how I got from there to here. Curiously, it was my dad who first told me about Barbara Moxon. Seems he and she were both friends with Governor John West back in the 1970s and worked together on a commission or two (talk about prophetic!) Much later, I worked with my dad for the SC Federation for Older Americans where I met, then AAUW President Attie May. The rest, as they say, is her-story!

If any remember the Peanuts comic strip of several years past, the series where Lucy was the psychiatrist charging a nickel for advice, you might remember my favorite which still hangs on the bulletin board above my computer: Lucy is comfortable in her boss' chair, feet on the desk, eyes closed with a self-assured smile on her face. The caption—A Woman's Place is In Control. Yeah. That just about sums it up for me!